

United Brethren Footprint in New Jersey

By
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United Brethren In Christ Footprint in New Jersey

“Wir sind Bruder”. With this greeting Rev. William Otterbein embraced Rev. Martin Boehm after a preaching service at Issac Long’s barn, near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The date was 1767. Rev. Otterbein, German Reformed, and Rev. Boehm, Mennonite, recognized their common pietistic beliefs and practices. Informally they began to work together to reach those needing Jesus Christ as Savior primarily within German speaking communities in Pennsylvania and Maryland.¹

As others joined their cause, this informal movement met yearly to pray, plan and strengthen their spiritual roots and outreach. Eventually codified in 1800 both Rev. Otterbein and Rev. Boehm were elected Superintendents, later bishops of the United Brethren in Christ. Close association with Bishop Francis Asbury and the Methodist Society led to the use of the Methodist Book of Discipline for their rules of order.²

The reach of local preachers of the United Brethren spread in the direction of German migration in this new nation. It is probable to assume itinerating preachers crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey, though no formal groups, were recognized until the later nineteenth century. Located primarily in the area around Camden, related to neighboring stations (the United Brethren term for a church) in Philadelphia. Ultimately the United Brethren tended to move westward through German immigrants settled west of the Allegheny-Appalachian Mountains.

From my research there was very little presence of the United Brethren beyond Camden. For purposes of clarity and brevity the primary source of United Brethren activity is found in Gible’s History of the East Pennsylvania Annual Conference on page 443³. I am adapting this page as the primary source, supplemented by other references found in annual conference journals. The East[ern] Pennsylvania Conference included a separate East German Conference from 1881 until it went out of existence by General Conference action in 1901.⁴ Though separate, in practice they were united; clergy moving from one to another. Gible’s history treats them as one. Few in number New Jersey mission are really a small footprint, especially compared to the New Jersey efforts of the Evangelical Association.⁵

For purposes of clarification, unless otherwise noted, text is from Gible’s one page history in the Camden region.⁶ Membership, when listed, as reported in year listed in a Conference Journal—be that the East German Conference or the East Pennsylvania Conference. Additional references and direct quotes are footnoted or appear in an appendix.

A personal observation. When reading nineteenth century annual conference minutes, neither the address nor the name of a mission or church is referenced. Therefore some references are educated

¹ Richey, et al pg. 5

² Behney & Eller, pg. 56

³ Gible, Phares Brubaker, History of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren in Christ (Dayton: The Otterbein Press) 1951

⁴ Gible, Introduction, ix.

⁵ See my paper, the Evangelical Footprint in New Jersey, which lists less than two dozen formal stations or missions in the northeast and southwest.

⁶ Gible, pg. 443

guesses. This history is like a jig saw puzzle of the same color. One puzzles over which station or church is referred. The best guess fits. Added to this is Gible's paragraph about Camden: Bethel, a mission I did not locate in a conference journal

Though there were informal efforts into New Jersey, D. Hoffman of the Missions Committee moved: Resolved (#2) That we locate a german(sic) mission in Camden, New Jersey in the hope that the parent board will do its part therein.⁷ The resolution was adopted.

Camden: Emmanuel Mission

In the year 1876 the Rev. David Hoffman pastor of Fourth Street German Mission in Philadelphia, organized a class in Camden. In 1878 this class with two others were constituted Camden Mission, Rev. George Stoll the appointed minister. By 1880 it was constituted a separate charge.

The building was located on Line Street on lots numbered 410-412. It was probably a union meetinghouse.

Though active for a few years, the station was no longer listed after 1888.

Membership					
1881	11	1882	4	1883-18	1884-18
					1885-7

Rev. Craumer, P. E. reports, "I found at the beginning of the year, to my great surprise, that the church had no legal title to any of the church houses in Philadelphia in which we worshipped, nor to any church property in Camden, NJ... We now hold titles...."⁸

"Mission in Camden, in my opinion, is in good condition. Number of children increased." reported P. E. Galback in his report to East German Conference.⁹

However optimistic Rev. Galback was the two years before, this charge proved to be troublesome. Thinking a change of Conference to East Pennsylvania would help, the 12th motion to Conference moved, "That we turn over to the East Penn Conference Port Richmond and Camden [Emmanuel] Mission provided said conference pays Walt Uhler's Claim on Port Richmond. Church and provided further that the German Brethren at Camden shall have one German (language) service at week of some kind."¹⁰ Adopted.

At the next East German Conference session of 1886, Rev. Amos Graul, P. .E. reports, "Port Richmond: Philadelphia and Camden:(Emmanuel) Mission, NJ which were given over to East Pennsylvania Conference last year were not accepted by them, consequently they were thrown back on our hands. A more explicit report will be given of these charges when reports are read."¹¹ A supplemental

⁷ East Pennsylvania Journal, 1878, pg. 137 (this is a bound Journal in the Lebanon Valley Collection at General Board of Archives and History. Pages are sequentially numbered from the beginning of the ledger.)

⁸ East Pennsylvania Journal, 1881, pg. 3

⁹ East German Conference, 1883, pg. 4

¹⁰ East German Conference, 1885, pg. 6

¹¹ East German Conference, 1886, pg. 4

report of the Boundary Committee recommended a sub-committee of three to determine a future for this charge. In the appointments, Camden is not listed, Port Richmond is.¹²

At the 1887 East German Conference, Rev. Amos Gaul offers a recommendation from the Committee on Boundaries, Resolution #7 “that we permit East Pennsylvania Conference to occupy our church at Camden NJ for the term of five years. Passed.¹³ The following year Rev. Gaul reported arrangements adopted and transfer complete. “Be it resolved that this conference approves of the action of the former Conference in turning over to the East Pennsylvania Conference said Port Richmond and Camden missions , and hereby ratifies and confirms the same, so that in the future said missions may be reported as belonging to the said East Pennsylvania Conference. Passed.¹⁴

However, the trustees who provide oversight for Emanuel made arrangements to continue the church under a different denominational body while the church was in appointment limbo. Hence at the 1888 session the secretary reads an elaborate opinion by lawyers at Camden, NJ in regard to unauthorized transfer the Emanuel United Brethren property on Line Street in Camden to another denomination by former trustees of the church. Bishop to create a committee for response.

In Rev. G. Rigor’s Presiding Elder report, “...I secured the transfer [referred to] by resolution as per their charter, of the Emanuel United Brethren Church on Line Street, Camden, NJ to East Pennsylvania Conference. The church had been vacant for one year. I went to Camden shortly afterward and according to the discipline (sic) called the Woodland Avenue quarterly conference together and appointed a board of trustees to take charge of the church, as per discipline (sic), page 124. When we came to take possession of the property we found that the former trustees, without any authority whatever from a quarterly conference had transferred it to another denomination with which they had identified themselves. We proceeded at once to consult competent counsel in the persons of Learning & Black, Camden, NJ who after considerable research and collection of facts and figures, in which I rendered them all the assistance possible, have submitted an opinion in writing which we will present to the Conference in due time.”¹⁵

An ad hoc committee appointed by the bishop offered the following motion to the Conference “We your committee, to whom was referred the Camden:Emanuel church papers, would respectfully report the following:

1) That this conference request Bishop E. B. Kephart to correspond with Bishop R. Dubs of the Evangelical Association concerning the question at issue and transmit to him a copy of the paper referred to us, and that these brethren endeavor to adjust this matter amicably and in a Christian spirit; and,

2) If it cannot be done, the Church Extension Society be instructed to proceed by legal process to obtain possession of that property for the United Brethren of Christ Church”.¹⁶

Later that year, at the East German Conference, Rev. A. Gaul, P. E. offer a motion, which was passed that all outstanding claims regarding pension were met. The Emanuel Church property now

¹² East German Conference, 1886, pg. 6, pg. 11

¹³ East German Conference, 1887, pg. 7

¹⁴ East German Conference, 1888, pg. 37

¹⁵ East Pennsylvania Conference, 1888, pg. 11.

¹⁶ East Pennsylvania Conference, 1888 pg. 19

formally belongs to East Pennsylvania Conference.¹⁷ There was no reference in the minutes to any legal problems.

In subsequent conference sessions follow-up reports on the lawsuit reported it was still pending, but with problems with the age or status of the lawyers. As the court case wore on, the defendants petition for a \$100.00 guaranty deposit. After that, there is no mention of either the suit or Emanuel Church.

Camden, Bethel Mission

Here is another instance where both minister and congregation came over to the United Brethren en masse. The congregation had W. O. Shimp as their minister and were worshipping in a rented chapel on Third Street. W. O. Shimp was appointed from 1883 to 1887. No appointments were made after February 1887 and in September of that year, our conference leaders decided to abandon this work.

Vineland

Vineland, New Jersey; Wilmington, Delaware; and Greensboro, Maryland, in 1885 were considered to be inviting fields. The three points were constituted a charge in that year. There are no additional references to them, except in 1886, W. H. Koppenhaver was to serve Greensboro Mission under the direction of the presiding elder.

Camden, Woodland Avenue Mission

A new mission was projected in Camden in September 1887. H. T. Denlinger of the class of 1887, Lebanon Valley College was assigned to the work. A tabernacle was provided and a village camp meeting was held with good results. The minister reported a class of twenty-five members. The Church Extension Society purchased for the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars, a lot, sixty by one hundred feet, located on Woodland Avenue between Seventh and Eighth streets. The Rev. Denlinger was reappointed in 1888, but resigned during the year, and the Rev. (G. W. Miles) Rigor of Philadelphia: Mt. Pisgah Church appointed Under his leadership a new church building was erected on the lot purchased. Its cost was \$775 of which amount \$103 was paid and about forty dollars subscribed. Rev. Rigor re-appointed to Camden Mission: Siloam (Woodland & Port Richmond) February 1889. However Isaiah Baltzell, P. E. report noted Camden: Woodland was not promising and praised Port Richmond.¹⁸ At the autumn East German Conference Rev. Isaiah Ball, P. E. reported Camden: Woodland does not promise sufficient (sic) to justify appropriation. The Church Extension Society agreed.¹⁹ No appointment was made in the fall of that year. The class was soon thereafter abandoned and the property sold.

Absecon

In 1877, Absecon, New Jersey was recognized as a charge. The presiding elder in 1888, reported that William Muir had tried to establish a church, but had no success in that undertaking. "Father" Muir was 83 at this time. Meager results due to his age. Presiding Elder seemed encouraged but no further actions taken.²⁰

Mt. Holly Mission

Dr. Enck, P. E presented a petition signed by sixty-three residents of Mt. Holly, NJ praying that

¹⁷ East German Conference, 1888, pg. 37

¹⁸ East Pennsylvania Journal, 1889, pg. 12

¹⁹ East German Annual Conference Journal, 1889, pg. 17, pg. 42

²⁰ East Pennsylvania Journal, 1888, pg. 10.

this Conference establish a mission in their city. The matter was referred to the favorable consideration of the Conference Church Extension Society for action²¹. Services were held in the Court House in Mt. Holly, New Jersey. A private individual purchased a property on Washington Street and rented it to the class for its use. This building was remodeled so that two hundred people could be seated. The class numbered fifty-eight, the Sunday School enrollment was fifty-five. The work was carried on during the years 1915 and 1916.

The Conference minutes seem confused at this point. At the 1916 Conference, it is reported that the Mt Holly Mission is a church. Later in the P. E. report, Dr. Enck states, "In the case of Mt. Holly, owing to the existing condition at that point, the proper committee should take that matter into further consideration before final and definitive actions be taken."²² Later in the minutes the Conference Missionary and Extension recommends the following relative to Mt. Holly:

Resolved, that under existing circumstances, it is considered inadvisable to take up the work at this time and therefore suggest that the pastor of the Philadelphia Second Church be and is hereby authorized to issue certificates of dismissal or transfer to such who desire them. Passed.²³ No discussion of the issue is noted.

On page 36, Rev. L. O. Gottschall reports in the statistical table : Begin—0; Received-61; Decrease-61; Year-end-0.

Appendix A

“ This volume contains the history of two annual conferences—East Pennsylvania and East German—treated as one. The two, operating separately, covered about the same geographical area as did East Pennsylvania before division and after union. During the period of separate existence , there were many shiftings between them of ministerial membership and local church affiliation. To state, in each case, the conference involved would have required numerous repetitions. To treat each conference as a distinct unit wold have meant too much duplication and would have made this treatise too lengthy.

The name of the German Conference was, “East German Conference,” over two periods; and “Eastern Conference,” also, over two periods. To avoid confusion, the designation, “East German Conference,” Is used throughout. Each conference changed from spring to fall in holding sessions. for East German Conference this change was made n the year 1881, for East Pennsylvania Conference, in the year 1889. this accounts for the frequent use of “Feb.” and “Oct.” in the listing of circuits and pastoral appointments.”²⁴

²¹ East Pennsylvania Journal, 1915, pg. 11, pg. 12

²² East Pennsylvania Journal, 1916, pg. 10

²³ *ibid.*, pg. 12

²⁴ Gible, pg. 11

Appendix B

History of East Pennsylvania Conference (from Gible history)²⁵ No. 15. Efforts in New Jersey

Camden, Emmanuel Mission

In the year 1876 the Rev. David Hoffman pastor of Fourth Street German Mission in Philadelphia, organized a class in Camden. In 1878 this class with two others were constituted Camden Mission and in 1880 it was constituted a separate charge. The following ministers served Camden Mission:

George Stoll, 1878-79;
Gottlieb Myer, 1879-1880 and 1881-82;
Frederick List, Feb. 1881-Oct. 1881; and 1882-83;
Daniel D. Lowery, 1880-81;
F. Marsfelter, H. E. Roediger, 1883-84
and J. H Unger, 1884-85. (clergy directory shows A. H.)

The building was located on Line Street on lots numbered 410-412. It was probably union meetinghouse. Nothing on our records concerning this congregation after the year 1888.

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²⁵ Gible, Phares B., History of the East Pennsylvania Conference (The East Pennsylvania Conference: Dayton, Ohio, 1951) pg. 443

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Mt. Holly Mission

We took hold of this work through request of a number of people identified with another denomination. Services were held in the Court House in Mt. Holly, New Jersey. A private individual purchased a property on Washington Street and rented it to the class for its use. This building was remodeled so that two hundred people could be seated. The class numbered fifty-eight, the Sunday School enrollment was fifty-five. The work was carried on during the years 1915 and 1916.²⁶

Revised 1/30/2019

²⁶ Conference Proceedings, 1873, pg. 23.